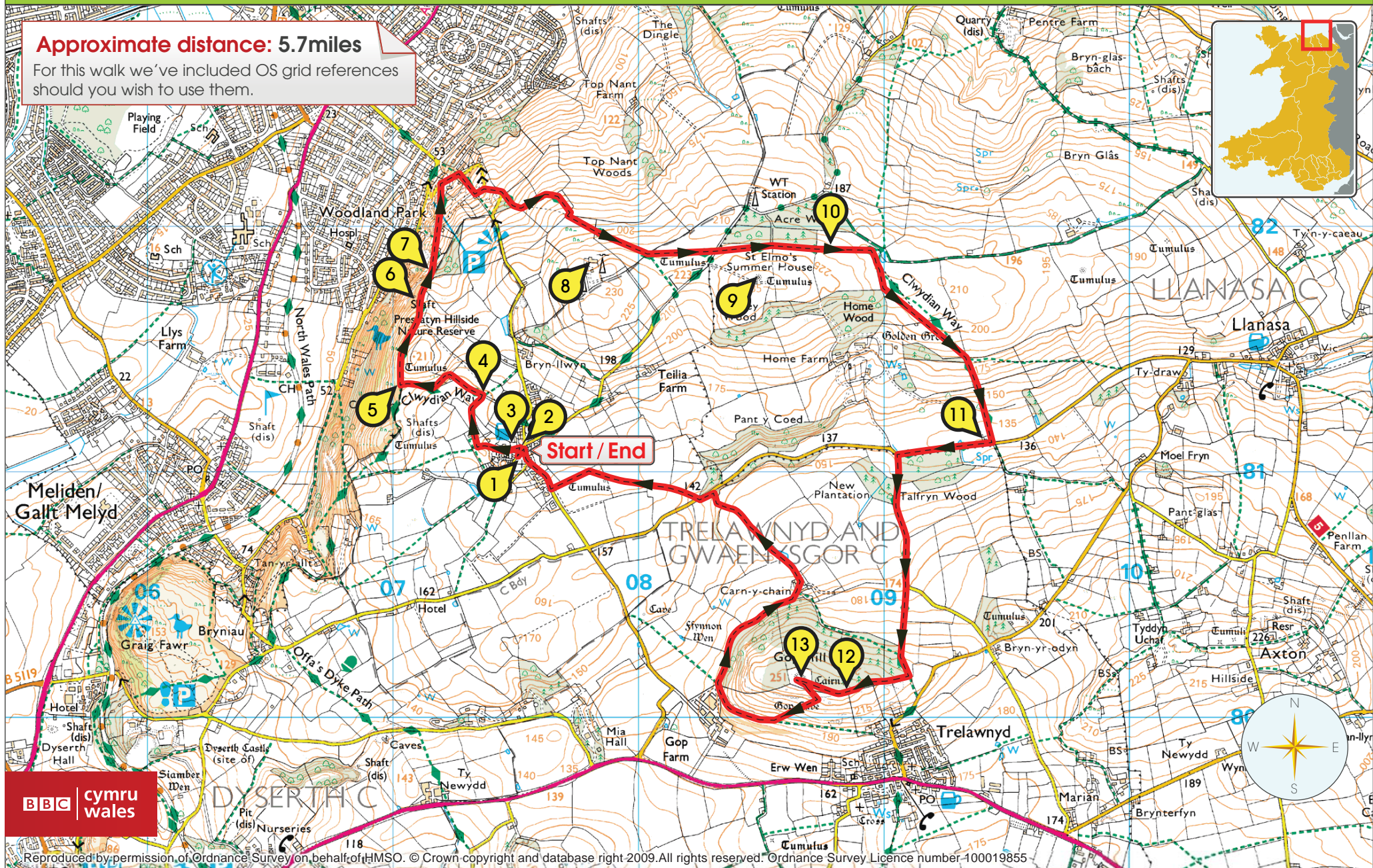
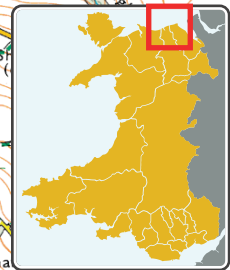


Weatherman Walking

Prestatyn

Approximate distance: 5.7 miles

For this walk we've included OS grid references should you wish to use them.



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The Weatherman Walking maps are intended as a guide to help you walk the route. We recommend using an OS map of the area in conjunction with this guide. Routes and conditions may have changed since this guide was written. The BBC takes no responsibility for any accident or injury that may occur while following the route. Always wear appropriate clothing and footwear and check weather conditions before heading out.

Weatherman Walking

Prestatyn

Start: Gwaenysgor village green

Starting ref: ST 0966 7260

Distance: 5.7 miles

Grade: Moderate

Walk time : Allow 3 hours (2.5 hours + stops)

There is limited parking in side roads near the village green and towards the Eagle and Child pub, but please be considerate and avoid restricting access for residents.

This walk, right on Prestatyn's back doorstep, is an unexpected gem. The location marks the start of the Clwydian Range Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, one of just five AONBs in Wales, and walkers can take in superb views as far as the Great Orme at Llandudno and even Blackpool Tower on a clear day!

Derek was lucky enough to have international rock star, cancer fundraiser and local boy Mike Peters as his guide. If you want to walk a section of Offa's Dyke, find a Cold War radar station and visit a church that boasts not only a Devil's door but also a leper's squint, it's time to follow in their footsteps!



This walk rocks!

Directions

The walk begins at the village green which has an interesting sign celebrating mention of the village in the Domesday book.



Gwaenysgor / Domesday Book memorial (SJ 075 810)

Gwaenysgor is an ancient settlement where people have lived for more than 5,000 years. Listed in the Domesday Book of 1086 as 'Wenescol', the village was described as small, with a 'wasted' church and just four householders! Two of these were Norman... Norman Jones and Norman Williams, we wonder?!



The historic village of Gwaenysgor was mentioned in the Domesday Book!

Weatherman Walking

Prestatyn

Before setting off on the walk proper, it's worth taking a look inside the church next to the village green.

2 St Mary Magdalene Church and circular churchyard (SJ 075 810)

The core of the church was built by the Normans but it's likely that this site was of religious importance for centuries before they arrived. A small Roman bronze horse, possibly an offering, was found here, and its circular churchyard pre-dates the 11th century.

In the corner of the church, to the side of the altar, is a small vertical window known as the Leper's Squint, installed to allow lepers to watch from outside during a service. Drws y Diafol – The Devil's Door – was the entrance for people who weren't baptised or had been excommunicated. After they'd entered the church the door was slammed shut behind them in order to keep the Devil out!



The fascinating features of St Mary Magdalene Church are worth a squint!

Retrace your steps from the church, past the Domesday book memorial and immediately take the first turning left off the main road which leads past the Eagle and Child pub.

3 Gwaenysgor village

In the 19th century, many village men were farmers and miners, with smallholders often working in the Meliden lead mines to supplement their income. Later, miners went from the village to work in the coalmines at Point of Ayr, walking down the hill to Prestatyn in the mornings and back in the evenings.

Continue along the road and on past a domestic garage, over a cattle grid and down a vehicle track for about 75 yards before turning right through a wooden kissing gate into a neatly mown field. Although this field does resemble a lawned garden this is a public right of way and the correct route. Head straight down across the field, through another gate into another field bearing slightly right towards wooden steps which lead onto a narrower path.



Kissing gate into the neatly mown field

Weatherman Walking

Prestatyn

4 Old Village Well (SJ 073 813)

Walking to a well to get water was part of village life, and many of the footpaths leading to wells like this one are still used today. There used to be a large pump at this well, and the shelf or seat next to it is where villagers put their buckets.

Standpipes were finally installed to provide piped water to the village in 1932, although mains water wasn't available to individual homes until after the Second World War. Imagine the domestic work this would have saved – particularly in large families!



This well once served the village!

From the well continue along the quite narrow path away from the village, bearing slightly left, then along the left hand field boundary up the hill until, quite suddenly, a wonderful panoramic view opens up to the west.

5 Views from Prestatyn Hillside (SJ 070 813)

What a spot! From here are superb views west to the Great Orme and Snowdonia, whilst on the steep slopes of the limestone escarpment below is Coed yr Esgob (Bishop's Wood). This SSSI woodland has a rich mixture of broadleaved trees and shrubs, including sessile oak, ash and wild cherry, as well as rarer species including small-leaved lime and juniper.

This type of broadleaved woodland today covers less than 10% of Wales, yet in prehistoric times it would have dominated the landscape!



Derek and Mike enjoy the scenery above Prestatyn Hillside Nature Reserve

Cross over the stile and turn right along a short section of Offa's Dyke Path. The airy path skirts along the very edge of Prestatyn Hillside with steep slopes down to Meliden, a suburb of Prestatyn.

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Prestatyn

6 Lead mining

This hillside and the nearby fields are covered in disused shafts from small lead mines. The larger Talargoch mine in Meliden employed 500 miners at one time, including boys as young as seven, and was one of the most productive mines in Flintshire, producing minerals such as copper, silver, calamine and lead and zinc ore. Production at Talargoch peaked between the 1850s and 1880s but mining at Meliden goes all the way back to Roman times!

Below this spot are the remains of Pant y Fachwen, a two-roomed cottage once home to 11 or 12 members of the same family! The ruins were lost until the 1990s, when they were uncovered when work was carried out on the footpath.

Continuing along the path, the views now begin to open up towards Prestatyn's beach - the official start or finish point of Offa's Dyke path.

7 Offa's Dyke Path/North Wales Coast Path

Opened in 1971, Offa's Dyke Path is one of Britain's 15 National Trails and attracts walkers from all over the world. The 177-mile route closely follows Offa's Dyke, an eighth century earthwork thought to have been constructed on the orders of the Mercian King Offa.

From here you also get a bird's eye view of the Victorian seaside resort of Prestatyn, which expanded rapidly with the coming of the railways. Earlier, the Romans settled here and built civic buildings including a bath house - so you could say there was a public pool here a long time before Pontins holiday camp!



The 177-mile Offa's Dyke Path starts - or ends - in Prestatyn

The path now drops quite steeply, partly down a flight of wooden steps, passing the end of an access road to houses on the right, before emerging onto the rather busy and narrow road which climbs steeply up from Prestatyn. Taking great care with passing traffic, turn uphill to the right along the road for about a hundred yards. Turn right at the concrete building, a shelter and viewing balcony at the bottom an area of municipal gardens, and walk up steps and a path on the right of the building. Continue steeply up through the woods bearing slightly right to emerge on an access road to houses. Turn left for a short distance then turn right steeply uphill through woodland once again. Near the top of the woods bear left up a short flight of wooden steps to emerge back on the road beside a metal crash barrier.

Turn left down the road, then at the next sharp corner in the road, turn right and follow a rather overgrown footpath signposted as a public footpath.

From here the route is well-signposted with yellow arrows on stiles and fence posts. So, following the yellow arrows, cross over two stiles and head diagonally up and across a field to reach another another stile.

Weatherman Walking

Prestatyn

8 Cold War radar station (SJ 078 818)

Looming ahead as you walk uphill are modern communication masts, and besides them are the remains of RAF Prestatyn, a RAF radar post built during the Cold War. The ROTOR station was built in 1953 and closed just a few years later in 1958. ROTOR was a huge and elaborate air defence radar system built by the government in the early 1950s to counter possible nuclear attack by Soviet bombers. In addition to new radars, operations rooms were built, often deep underground in case of a nuclear attack. The operations block here was later used by the local gun club and is now sealed solid.



Derek and the crew make the climb towards the Cold War radar station

Having crossed over the stile that's overlooked by the old radar station bear left and follow the direction indicated by the yellow arrows on the stiles, across three more fields to a minor road.

Go straight across and over the stiles on either side of the road then follow the left hand field boundary alongside Acre Wood. Up to the right you'll see a rounded hillock.



The hills of Prestatyn are alive with the sound of music!

9 St.Elmo's Summer House (SJ 084 817)

Marked on the OS map is St Elmo's Summer House, although there is little trace left of a building. The summer house was built on top of an ancient round barrow, or burial mound, by the owners of the Golden Grove estate, to make the most of the panoramic views. But why the name St.Elmo's? Perhaps there's a seafaring connection with St.Elmo's fire, a phenomenon during which a ship's masts glow during an electrical storm, or maybe it refers to Saint Erasmus of Formia, also known as St Elmo and the patron saint of sailors. What do you think?!

Weatherman Walking

Prestatyn

From the minor road cross three fields, following the line of telegraph poles in the third field. Towards the far end of the field, bear right to find a stile in the middle of the field boundary, this time marked by a white arrow on a green disk. Cross over this stile quickly followed by another, then bear right across the next field.



Two stiles in quick succession followed by a right turn



Views of Liverpool Bay (SJ 087 819)

Before you head on towards the Gop, pause to take in the views north and east towards the Dee estuary, the Wirral, Merseyside, the wind turbines of Liverpool Bay and even, if you're lucky, Blackpool Tower!



The views are worth the climb!

Head down towards the middle of the lower field boundary and over a wooden stile beside a metal gate. Now head diagonally across to the bottom left hand corner of the next field. Climb over three more stiles in quick succession to emerge from a small woodland with pheasant feeders at the top of a steeply sloping field. Keeping close to the field boundary on your right, walk down this field and the next one to emerge, over a stile, onto a country road. Turn right along this road, passing the entrance to the Golden Grove estate on the right.



After dropping down through fields alongside the Golden Grove estate, turn right along this country road

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Prestatyn

11 Golden Grove estate (SJ 094 811)

Surrounded by its 1000 acre estate, Golden Grove house is a Grade I listed 16th-century Elizabethan mansion built by courtier Sir Edward Morgan and owned by his family for the next 200 years. Sir Edward's descendants were staunch Royalists during the Civil War and fought in a number of skirmishes and sieges, with one Captain Morgan being killed during a rout.

Today Golden Grove is a luxury B&B. The spectacular gardens include an Edwardian terraced garden designed by Lady Aberconway, a recently added nuttery and a raised pond, and are occasionally open to the public under the National Gardens Scheme.



The delightful setting of the Golden Grove estate.

Continue along the road for about 400 yards then turn left uphill along a narrower country lane for about 600 yards up as far as a left hand bend in the road.

On the right hand side of this bend is a stile, partly hidden in the hedgerow, which leads onto a path up the right hand boundary of two fields. Continue to the top right hand corner of the upper field and go through a wooden kissing gate on the right, into Gop Wood.

Next to this gate is an old stone stile in the wall and a waymarker post for the North Wales Pilgrim's Way. Follow the path into the wood, bearing left to reach openings along the edge of the wood with wonderful views to the south, towards the Clwydian Hills, the Vale of Clwyd, and the village of Trelawnyd a stone's throw away at the foot of the hill.



The gate into Gop Wood signposted as the North Wales Pilgrim's Way

12 Views of Trelawnyd (SJ 088 800)

The pretty village of Trelawnyd was inspired by Newmarket in England. An enterprising 18th century landowner called John Wynne had visions of developing Trelawnyd as a thriving market town with a racecourse; he renamed it Newmarket and it flourished for a while, but Wynne's plans never quite took off. Rhyl instead became the dominant market town and in the 1950s the village officially reverted to Trelawnyd!



Views to the south from the edge of Gop Wood, with Trelawnyd in the foreground at the foot of the hill

Weatherman Walking

Prestatyn

Continue along the path on the edge of the wood which leads through a narrower section through bushes to emerge at the foot of a steep hill which is in fact a large man-made mound. Bear left at first, diagonally up a rising path, then back right to the summit of the mound.

13 Gop Hill (SJ 086 801)

Welcome to Gop Hill – something of a local secret! This is the second largest prehistoric monument in Britain, after Silbury Hill in Wiltshire, yet hardly anyone knows it's here! The massive man-made Neolithic cairn is about 14m high and 100m by 70m across, and is around 5,000 years old. Although no evidence of a burial chamber has been found, the cairn is thought to be similar to the Neolithic passage graves of Ireland or Silbury Hill.

The Gop is also known as Cop y Goleuni, or the 'Mount of Lights'. Disappointingly, it's not because of some mysterious earth phenomena but due to its use as a beacon in the 17th century!



On top of Gop Hill is the second largest prehistoric monument in the UK!

Descend to the point where you arrived out of Gop Wood at the foot of the mound (SJ 0869 8012). Then turn down to the right along a slightly hidden path which leads to a wooden kissing gate out to the field below.



The gate through to the field below Gop Hill

TAKE CARE HERE and first walk directly downhill until you can see that you're below the limestone outcrop on the right. This is in fact the location of Gop Cave where Neolithic remains were found.



The limestone outcrop with Gop Cave

Weatherman Walking

Prestatyn

Then bear right down the hill along a clear 'avenue' between the gorse bushes, heading for the farm buildings at the bottom of the hill.

Bear right near the bottom of the hill, past a ruined old dovecote, probably built in the late sixteenth century. It would have housed some 700 pigeons or doves which then provided a ready supply of meat and eggs for Gop Farm.

Skirt around the perimeter fence above the back of the farm, and through more gorse bushes to reach a gate onto a farm track.

There's a choice of route from here. You could continue directly across the track, through the metal kissing gate and diagonally across the field to reach the narrow and rather busy main road back to Gwaenysgor. However a better choice which avoids most of the busy road is to turn right, climb over a wooden stile next to a metal gate, and then follow a rather muddy old farm track.

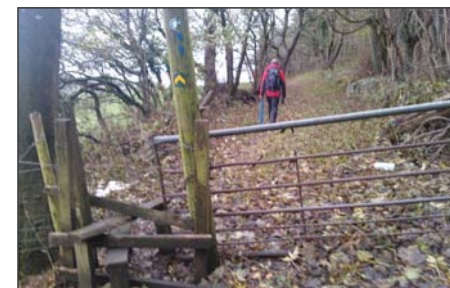
Continue along this old track which skirts around the edge of the woodland for about 500 yards, until you see a farmhouse on the left.

As indicated by the Millennium Trail signpost, turn left along the footpath past the gable end, and around to the front of Carn-y-chain farmhouse, then left along the farm track which leads out onto the public road.

From here the Millennium Trail and public footpath signposts will guide you back to Gwaenysgor. Turn left from the farm track then almost immediately right off the road up a few steps and through a wooden gate into the field. Then continue diagonally across fields to a farm track which leads to the main road on the outskirts of Gwaenysgor. Turn right and walk up the hill back to your starting point at the village green.



The clear way down the hill between the gorse bushes



A sometimes muddy old track, but a route that avoids the busy road



Follow the Millennium Trail signpost towards Gwaenysgor

Weatherman Walking

Prestatyn

Love Hope Strength Foundation

As well as fronting acclaimed Welsh rock band The Alarm, two-times cancer survivor Mike Peters co-founded the Love Hope Strength Foundation to raise funds for vital medical equipment and supplies and to provide music-related and outreach support for cancer programmes. LHSF also encourages people to sign up to the International Bone Marrow Registry or to make a donation, as it costs £40 to register each new potential stem cell donor with Delete Blood Cancer. To find out more visit www.lovehopestrength.co.uk



Gop Hill is a favourite spot of Mike's for finding peace and inspiration